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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I really can't believe it, but it's almost Memorial Day already! The unofficial beginning of summer. Where did April and May go? We've had some nice days recently, but it's become damp lately. I've done little in the yard because of the cool nights, but maybe that will change shortly. Lots of things to get done outside, and in.

The war on spam continues to heat up! There have been a lot of discussions on how to combat this garbage - some good and some outright ridiculous. Imagine one suggestion to levy a small tax on e-mail to thwart spam! I'm sure that the debates will continue for quite some time before some solutions will come about.

Well, I'm going to cut this week's comments really short. I want to start planning some of my holiday weekend activities - if the weather allows them. Definitely plenty of barbecue activity! Maybe get in some golf, if I can. We'll see! Remember to play it safe this long weekend.

Until next time...

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HighWire 0.1.2 Released

While months have gone by since the last public release. Rarely a day has gone by without work being contributed to the project. We hope you enjoy some of the updates and work that has gone on in the last few months. While we still have a a lot of work ahead of us, this will hopefully provide you with as satisfying update.

Changes since the last version include:

The new implemented navigation bar allows easy entering of URLs as well as going for/backward in view history (can be hidden/shown by holding down the ALT key while clicking the window's closer button).

Changed the behaviour of the window's info bar to have it more logical and

informative.

New control keyword for the configuration file to change the appearance of the info bar, can be displayed now at the window's bottom (see example.cfg highwire.cfg for explanation).

Forms now also support selection lists, as given from <select name=foo> <option value=bar>.. tags.

Improved handling of framesets, frames are resizeable now.

Fixed wrong image colours under TrueColor, added support for 16bit HighColor with reverted byte order. Improved vertical position and line height calculation when align=top/bottom is set.

Initial implementation of OVLs for different network support (MiNTnet and STiK2).

Improved calculation of the width of tables and their cells, makes several pages looking a bit better.

Fixed a bug in interpreting of quoted file names from VA_START.

Improved parsing of urls to encode HTML entities and remove control characters from links. Also invalid urls of the form with a missing http: are supported now.

Fixed a bug in parsing of plain text files which led to an endless loop on very long lines.

Fixed a bug in the style=".." parsing function which could cause crashes before.

Mended some more memory leaks.

Overworked charset encoding to speedo encoding for better performance.

To download and more information, visit the
HighWire website: http://highwire.atari-users.net/

AtariSIO V0.20 beta Released

The new version includes the following enhancements:

- support for DCM/DI/XFD disk images
- transparent (de-)compression support through zlib
- devfs support in the kernel driver
- support for non-standard SIO2PC cables (using DSR instead of RI)
- added 'all' option to several atariserver functions
- several minor bug fixes and improvements

AtariSIO can be downloaded from my homepage

http://www.horus.com/~hias/atari/

so long,

Hias

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

[Editor's note: See, Unka Joe stops smoking and his new-fangled Mac PowerBook goes on the fritz! Joe will return next week!]

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - GameCube Sales Declining Sharply!
Atari Shares Sinking! Matrix Up!
Videogames Group to Challenge Law!
Austin Gaming Expo! And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Atari Shares Sink; 'Matrix' Selling Well

Have investors entered "The Matrix" and then left again just as quickly?

Shares in video game publisher Atari Inc. sank on Tuesday, their fourth straight day of losses, as "Enter the Matrix," the company's biggest-budget game yet, faced early negative reviews despite signs of strong sales.

After the April 17 announcement that the $30-million game had been completed, shares in Atari, formerly known as Infogrames Inc., went on a run, gaining about 200 percent through May 14, the day before the game's launch.

But since May 14 the stock has been sliding, losing almost 28 percent, although it is still up 168 percent in 2003. Analysts have said "Enter the Matrix" is key to the company's fortunes, especially as it faces bond payments over the next two years.

"Enter the Matrix" represented an unusually tight collaboration with Hollywood. The Wachowski brothers, who wrote and directed the film, wrote

the game as well and shot an hour of footage with their actors specifically for the game.

The film has broken box office records and initial data show the game as a top-seller on Amazon.com in the United States and more generally in the United Kingdom. Full sales data for May are not expected until mid-June.

Early reviews on the game, though, have been lukewarm.

"If you are a fan of ’The Matrix’ and like action games, then the game is for you. However, the game isn’t an outstanding representation of its genre, but rather just a good one," wrote Alloutgames.com in a review of the PC version, which it gave a 78 percent rating.

Gamerankings.com, which amalgamates reviews from across the Web and averages their scores, showed scores of between 70 percent and 80 percent for the game. Top games regularly exceed 90 percent in their calculations.

A spokeswoman for Atari was not available to comment on the early reviews of the game.

According to Frank Sadowski, vice president of consumer electronics merchandising at Amazon.com, "Enter the Matrix" is the top seller on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox, outselling its closest competitor two-to-one and four-to-one, respectively.

On the GameCube, "Matrix" is barely number two to "The Legend of Zelda," while on the PC it is second but being outsold three-to-one by "Sims Superstar."

The game is also the top seller on all platforms in the United Kingdom, Europe’s top games market, according to weekly ChartTrack sales data.

"Enter the Matrix" was released the same day as the hotly- anticipated film "The Matrix Reloaded," which had the second- largest opening weekend ever for a movie and the best ever for an "R"-rated film.

Sony to Launch ’Charlie’s Angels’ Game Online

"Charlie’s Angels," the 1970s TV show that spurred a blockbuster movie and now a sequel is coming back yet again - as a video game.

Sony Corp.’s movie division on Monday said would release an online video game based on "Charlie’s Angels" to coincide with the new "Angels" movie which it is also releasing.

The double-barreled release comes as Hollywood and the games industry increasingly look to cross-promote their offerings on the view that the hype over a game can help boost the fortunes of a new movie, and vice versa.

Sony Pictures Digital Networks said "Charlie’s Angels: Angel X" would be released in June to tie in with the June 27 theatrical debut of "Charlie’s Angels: Full Throttle."

The game is being developed by 7 Studios, best known for console games like "Defender," and will feature five levels set in places like a scrap

yard and a martial arts dojo.

Among the games that have been or will be released this year to coincide with new movies are "Enter the Matrix," "Finding Nemo," "Terminator 3" and "Tomb Raider."

The TV side of the entertainment business has also increasingly tied up with the games industry, as seen in deals games based on shows like "Alias" and "CSI."

On Friday NBC, a unit of General Electric Co., said it had entered a deal with games developer Arush Entertainment to create a line of games based on the stunt reality series "Fear Factor." Arush is also working on a "Playboy" series of games.

Videogames Group to Challenge Washington State Law

Washington State Gov. Gary Locke signed a bill on Tuesday making it illegal to sell or rent video games to minors that depict violence against law enforcement officers - a move that an industry trade group immediately said it would challenge in court.

The bill, signed into law by the Democratic governor, calls for $500 fines to be imposed on anyone who sells or rents a game depicting violence against police to customers under the age of 17.

The Interactive Digital Software Association, the trade group for the U.S. video game industry, said in a statement it would go to court to seek an injunction against enforcement of the law. The IDSA said the law violates First Amendment guarantees of free speech.

The association has already successfully defeated an Indianapolis ordinance in federal appellate court that would have restricted the access of minors to arcades, and it is challenging a St. Louis ordinance in federal appellate court that would impose retail restrictions on violent games.

"If the goal is to keep games out of the hands of kids for whom they are not appropriate ... then the answer is to focus on parental education and awareness of the (ratings system), not to try to turn retailers into parents," IDSA President Doug Lowenstein said in a statement.

Nintendo Profits Decline 37 Percent

Nintendo Co. reported Thursday a 37 percent decline in profit for the fiscal year through March as sales of its GameCube console fell short of the Japanese video-game maker’s target in a clear defeat to rival Sony PlayStation 2.

The Kyoto-based company, which makes Pokemon and Super Mario games, earned 67.3 billion yen ($572 million) for the fiscal year ended March 31, down from 106 billion yen the previous year.

Sales totaled 504 billion yen ($4.3 billion), down 9 percent from 555 billion yen a year earlier. Nintendo generated 75 percent of its sales

overseas.

Since going on sale in 2001, GameCube has lost ground to PlayStation 2, the rival machine from Sony Corp., which has emerged the global leader in the sector.

As of March 31, 9.55 million GameCube machines have been sold around the world - short of Nintendo's goal of 10 million and far below the 51.2 million PlayStation 2 consoles shipped worldwide so far.

Nintendo is about to face competition from Sony in portable game machines as well, where its Game Boy has dominated. This month, Sony announced it will introduce its own handheld, the PlayStation Portable, next year. It did not show a prototype or give a price.

Nintendo has sold 33.8 million Game Boy Advance machines so far, including 15.7 million in fiscal 2002.

The arrival of a Sony portable is a big threat to Nintendo at a time when it is counting on Game Boy Advance sales and hoping to sell games that link the Game Boy Advance with the GameCube, said Takeshi Tajima, analyst at BNP Paribas in Tokyo.

"Trying to prevent GameCube from dying out is the only strategy left for Nintendo," he said. "When the gap in market share is this great, a rally from behind is virtually impossible."

Nintendo is forecasting even lower profits at 65 billion yen ($553 million) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2004. It predicts sales will improve to 550 billion yen ($4.7 billion).

In fiscal 2002, Nintendo fared better in selling game software than in selling machines.

It sold 59 million games for Game Boy in fiscal 2002, up 26 percent from 47 million a year ago. It sold 46 million games for GameCube, about triple the 14 million in fiscal 2001.

Nintendo officials have said they no longer hope to compete in making more sophisticated machines. They want instead to make fun software, an effort that won't cost as much but can produce profits.

"It is becoming increasingly more difficult to create new and unique games which utilize the full capabilities of new hardware," Nintendo said in a statement Thursday.

"Pocket Monsters Ruby & Sapphire" sold well, proving that Pokemon games remain strong products, it said.

Nintendo stocks, which has slid over the last year, finished up 3 percent at 8,440 yen ($72) Thursday on the Tokyo Stock Exchange shortly before earnings were announced.

Rival Japanese game maker Sega Corp. has also suffered from the competition from Sony but managed to turn a profit in fiscal 2002 for the first time in six years. Sega, famous for Sonic the Hedgehog, dumped its Dreamcast console in 2001 and makes games for PlayStation 2, GameCube and Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox.

Sony's game unit is making solid profits. Sony is also planning to make

the game machine a central part of what it envisions as the future network home, where people use mobile phones, Net-linking cars and TVs, as well as the game machine, to watch movies, read the news and exchange e-mail.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Austin Gaming Expo

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 21, 2003

A Celebration of Video Games, Both Past and Present

Austin, TX - As the Video Gaming Industry now surpasses the 10 Billion dollar mark, videogame enthusiasts will converge this Summer in Central Texas for the Austin Gaming Expo. Kicking off its first year, this premiere event in the making caters to Young and Old, Classic and Contemporary gamers alike. Attendees will take part in a celebration of video games, the world's most popular form of electronic entertainment.

The Austin Gaming Expo is being held on July 26, 2003 in Austin, Texas, centrally located to all of Texas' major cities. This event is the first of its kind for the state of Texas, and will feature a large number of vendors and exhibitors showcasing both classic and modern video games and consoles. AGE Co-Organizer Tim Wilson states, -Austin's central location in Texas makes it a great venue to hold a gaming event of this nature.-

Featured sponsors of this event include:

AtariAge.com
AtariCart.com
AtariProtos.com
The Atari History Museum
Goodwill Computerworks
Pixels Past
Video Game Bible
Sunmark

"Classic video gaming fans across the southern United States have desired an event like this for years, and we are pleased to be able to finally grant this wish- says AGE Co-Organizer Albert Yarusso, who is also one of the co-founders of the popular Atari fansite AtariAge.com.

Highlights of the Austin Gaming Expo include:

œ Vendors with a wide variety of videogame merchandise for sale
œ Large number of game systems setup for play, both Classic and Contemporary
œ New game releases and demos from notable Homebrew authors

œ Game tournaments on consoles of all types
œ Giveaways and door prizes
œ Buy, Sell and Trade with other gaming enthusiasts

The Austin Gaming Expo is being held at the Marriott Austin North, a modern hotel with many amenities for attendees and those wishing to stay overnight in the Austin area. The show hours are from 10am until 8pm and admission is $5. Vendor tables are available for $30 for any individuals or businesses.

For more information, please visit the Austin Gaming Expo website at:

http://www.AustinGamingExpo.com

CONTACT: info@austingamingexpo.com

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Roxio Buys Pressplay, to Relaunch Napster

Napster is coming back, this time as a paid music service in partnership with two of the record labels that fought to shut it down, according to a deal announced on Monday,

In an ironic coda to the Napster saga, CD-burning software maker Roxio Inc., said it had bought Pressplay, a struggling online music service launched by Vivendi Universal and Sony Corp., for about $39.5 million in cash and stock.

The deal combines the Napster brand with assets of two of the record labels that forced Napster's closure in July 2001 through lawsuits claiming that the popular file-sharing network aided Internet piracy.

Roxio bought the rights to Napster's name and technology at a bankruptcy auction last year for just over $5 million.

Analysts said the deal pointed to more consolidation in online music, where commercial services have had only mixed success in the nearly two years since Napster was shut down.

Another subscription service, Listen.com, was recently sold to RealNetworks Inc., while independent service FullAudio denied rumors on Monday it was shopping for a buyer.

"The market's going through consolidation because these services have been around for a couple of years, burning cash and not generating much revenues from subscribers or advertising," said PJ McNealy, analyst with GartnerG2.

The one standout success in online music has been the service launched by Apple Computer Inc., which sold more than 2 million songs at 99 cents each in just over two weeks, easily topping the traffic on label-sanction services such as Pressplay and MusicNet, according to analysts.

The service, accessible only on Apple computers, is a pay-per-download model that does not require users to pay a monthly subscription, unlike other services.

Chris Gorog, Roxio's chief executive, said the company was evaluating both subscription and pay-as-you-download models for its upcoming Napster-branded service, expected to be launched before Roxio's fiscal year ends in March 2004.

Roxio said it bought Pressplay's technology and catalog rights with all five major music labels for $12.5 million cash and about 3.9 million shares. The $39.5 million purchase price excluded about $1 million in transaction costs.

Roxio Chief Financial Officer Elliot Carpenter said the company would spend about $20 million to relaunch Napster and cautioned that it would lose money until the service was adopted widely. Roxio said it will offer a more detailed outlook when it reports earnings on May 21.

"Napster is the most prominent brand in online music. It's a massive competitive advantage," Gorog told Reuters.

Larry Kenswil, president of Universal Music Group's eLabs, agreed. "We thought this deal would bring a lot more subscribers to Pressplay a lot quicker because of the branding," he said.

But others questioned whether consumers would be willing to pay for Napster, a name synonymous with free music for many.

"I think Roxio's plans to integrate a service like Pressplay is a great move, but it will still be a huge challenge to rehabilitate the Napster brand to consumers who largely equate with it being free," McNealy said.

Under the terms of the deal, Sony Music and Universal Music each have the right to earn up to $6.25 million if the Napster service generates positive cash flow, and both companies will have a representative on Roxio's board.

In a March filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Universal said it had lost $30 million on Pressplay.

Congress Needs to Act on Spam, Lawmakers Say

Congress needs to move quickly to outlaw unwanted "spam" e-mail, lawmakers and tech-industry experts said on Wednesday in a hearing that highlighted the urgency the issue has taken on Capitol Hill.

Senators at a Commerce Committee hearing proposed tougher criminal penalties, extended racketeering laws, and international treaties to combat the unsolicited pitches that now make up between half and three-quarters of all e-mail traffic.

Tech-industry moguls like America Online Vice Chairman Ted Leonsis said they needed a national law to help fight the problem, while even one online marketer who said he sends out up to 180 million messages each day said it would be a good idea.

Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain said he hoped to send an anti-spam bill to the Senate floor by August.

"I hope to get this issue to the floor sometime before the summer recess because it’s clearly an issue that needs to be addressed one way or another," the Arizona Republican said.

Efforts to pass a national law have foundered for years in Congress, but with the volume of spam now doubling every four to six months, the issue has come to a head in Washington.

The Federal Trade Commission, which has used anti-fraud laws to prosecute some 53 spammers, said it needed additional authority to go after Internet-based scam artists who operate across national borders.

The consumer-protection agency, which recently hosted a three-day conference on the issue, said it would deliver a report to Congress within 45 days recommending the best way to tackle the problem.

Sen. Ron Wyden, whose anti-spam bill was approved by the committee last year but did not pass the Senate, said he did not want to wait for the FTC’s report.

"We’ve had a lot of years of study and I think we ought to get moving on it," said the Oregon Democrat, who introduced his bill again this year with Montana Republican Conrad Burns.

Other lawmakers pitched their bills to the committee as well. Minnesota Democratic Sen. Mark Dayton called for the creation of a special law-enforcement team to track down spammers, while Florida Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson said prosecutors should be able to bring anti-spam cases under organized-crime statutes. New York Democratic Sen. Charles Schumer said the United States should set up a "do not spam" list, similar to the FTC’s anti-telemarketing "do not call" list.

FTC Commissioner Orson Swindle said Internet providers and other businesses bear the primary responsibility to stop spam through filters and responsible marketing practices.

"I have not seen one piece of legislation that I think would be adequate," Swindle said. "This is going to be an evolving process."

Lawmakers Unveil Long-Awaited Anti-Spam Bill

U.S. lawmakers introduced a long-awaited anti-spam bill on Friday that is likely to move quickly through Congress, despite criticism from consumer groups who say it will do little to stop the plague of junk e-mail.

The bill, sponsored by North Carolina Rep. Richard Burr, is the result of months of negotiations by powerful Republican lawmakers in the House of Representatives who hope to beat back spam while still allowing businesses to market their products over the Internet.

The Reduction in Distribution of Spam Act, as it is known, establishes tough penalties for e-mail marketers who lie about their identities or engage in other deceptive tactics, but otherwise does not prevent businesses from contacting anybody with an e-mail address.

Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner and Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Billy Tauzin have signed on as co-sponsors, making it likely that the bill will encounter few hurdles on its way to a full vote.

Sensenbrenner said he hoped the House would pass the bill by the end of June.

The RID Spam Act has also drawn backing from technology titans like Microsoft Corp. and trade groups like the Direct Marketing Association. But anti-spam groups said it would do little to fight the problem as marketers could still send out as many messages as they wished.

"We find it incomprehensible that, in the face of such strong consumer outcry to stop spam, the response from Congress is legislation that protects marketers and deprives customers of their right to be left alone," said the Coalition Against Unsolicited Email, a grass-roots group of 40,000 Internet users.

Unsolicited commercial e-mail is now widely viewed as a serious threat to the Internet as a whole, flooding users' in-boxes and costing businesses billions of dollars in wasted bandwidth. Internet providers and filtering companies say spam now makes up between 40 percent and 80 percent of all e-mail.

The Federal Trade Commission estimates that two out of three of these messages contain misleading information of some sort, such as false return addresses, misleading subject lines, or pitches for miracle cures and other questionable products.

Burr's bill seeks to cut down on deceptive spam by requiring e-mail marketers to disclose their online and physical addresses and honor customer requests to be taken off their mailing lists. Pornographic e-mail would be labeled as such, and marketers would not be allowed to "harvest" e-mail addresses from sources that say they will not resell customer information.

Those who violate these guidelines could face fines of up to $1.5 million and jail time of up to two years. Internet providers, state attorneys general and federal-law enforcement agencies such as the FTC and the Justice Department could go after suspected spammers, but the bill does not allow individual lawsuits or class-action suits.

The bill would also override existing state laws, except those that prohibited misleading information, and carves out an exemption for "legitimate" commercial messages, such as airline ticket confirmations and bank notices.

Absent from the list of co-sponsors was New Mexico Republican Rep. Heather Wilson, whose earlier anti-spam bill was sidelined after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

A Wilson aide said the bill contained too many loopholes and set the bar too high for the FTC and other enforcers.

The Senate is expected to act soon on a similar bill introduced by Montana Republican Conrad Burns and Oregon Democrat Ron Wyden.

Tough California Anti-Spam Bill Passes in Senate

The California State Senate on Thursday approved a bill that would make it illegal to send unsolicited e-mail advertising and allows people to sue so-called spammers for $500 per unwanted message.

If the bill, which now goes to the California Assembly, becomes law, it would be one of the strictest anti-spam measures in the country. Gov. Gray Davis has taken no position on the measure.

Federal regulators and lawmakers are trying to find ways to keep computers from being inundated with spam e-mails, which tout everything from sex aids to home loans and are estimated to account for between a third and a half of e-mail traffic.

The measure, which was approved by a vote of 21-to-12, would require Internet marketers to get advance approval from e-mail recipients if they did not already have a business relationship with them.

Currently, California law requires spammers to include "ADV" in the subject line of their e-mail so people will know it is an advertisement. The law also requires spammers to stop sending the e-mails after recipients ask them to or face a $1,000 fine.

The new "opt-in" bill puts the burden on Internet marketers to get approval to spam consumers rather than forcing people to ask to be removed from the spam list after the fact.

Under the new bill, a judge can triple the $500 fine if it is determined that the spam sender willfully and knowingly violated the California law.

The measure is modeled on a federal law banning junk faxes which allows consumers to sue fax spammers for $500 per fax.

"Spam isn’t just annoying; it burns people’s time and money by forcing them to wade through millions of messages that cost spammers virtually nothing to package and fire off," said Democratic State Senator Debra Bowen, of Redondo Beach near Los Angeles.

Last month, a bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate that would require Internet marketers to provide legitimate return addresses on their e-mails and to honor requests to be taken off customer lists. It would not allow consumers to sue spammers directly, but would require state attorneys general to sue on their behalf.

A January study by Ferris Research estimated that spam costs U.S. corporations as much as $8.9 billion each year. The amount of spam jumped 86 percent between 2001 and 2002, to more than 260 billion e-mails, according to Jupiter Research.

The problem has become so large that the Direct Marketing Association, a trade group that represents telemarketers and direct mailers, last year reversed its position and said it would support national anti-spam legislation.

More than half of the states in the country have anti-spam laws.

Consumer Groups Seek Law to Bar Bulk Spam

Eight consumer groups sent a letter to U.S. congressional leaders on Thursday urging them to bar Internet advertisers from sending unsolicited bulk commercial e-mail and to let people sue if they get spammed.

The current bills "repeat many of the legislative mistakes that have exacerbated the unsolicited commercial e-mail problem, permitting it to grow to the epidemic proportions it has reached today," the letter said.

It was sent to eight lawmakers who head up the Judiciary and Commerce committees in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Groups signing the letter included the Consumer Federation of America, the SpamCon Foundation, the Privacy Rights Clearing House, the Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial Email and Junkbusters Corp., a group that opposes invasive marketing of all types.

The major anti-spam measures now before Congress would allow advertisers to continue sending mass spam, requiring them to remove individuals from spam lists only upon request.

The proposed federal legislation also would allow government agencies or Internet service providers, but not individuals, to sue spammers who violate the law.

All the current bills "are ’opt-out’ bills, which basically say spammers can spam as long as they stop when an individual asks them to stop. They are basically a federal license to spam," said Jason Catlett, president of Junkbusters.

People don’t have the time to opt out, he said.

"Some people already are getting hundreds of spams per day," Catlett said. "You could spend most of your working day trying to figure out the complicated opt-out procedures that spam e-mail requires."

Laws to prevent e-mail spam should mirror federal legislation that allows people to sue companies that send them junk facsimiles, the groups argue.

Microsoft Corp., AOL Time Warner Inc. and many other companies prefer opt-out anti-spam legislation and oppose allowing individuals to sue.

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates sent a letter this week to Senators John McCain and Ernest Hollings, chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Commerce Committee.

Gates argued that industry should be allowed to set good practices and regulate itself, and that ISPs and state Attorneys General should be allowed to prosecute spammers, but that individuals should not.

Lawsuits have already been filed by ISPS including Microsoft, AOL and EarthLink, as well as by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and many state attorneys general, Gates said.

Earlier on Thursday, the California State Senate approved a bill, modeled on the junk fax law, that would force spammers to get permission before sending e-mail to consumers they don't already have a business relationship with and allow citizens to sue for $500 for each message.

Delaware is the only state with an opt-in anti-spam law, but only the Delaware Attorney General can sue spammers, which has never happened, Catlett said.

Spam has become a scourge in corporate and consumer e-mail inboxes, with estimates that it represents one-third to half of all e-mail messages and costs companies billions of dollars each year.

Will Taxing E-Mail Stop Spam?

Lawmakers, antispam activists, and even a self-professed spammer are mulling several methods for canning spam, from imposing a small charge for sending e-mail to an international spam treaty.

Congress should impose a small charge for each piece of e-mail sent, one senator told the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee at a hearing Wednesday.

"I think it's worth looking at some very, very small charge for every e-mail sent, so small that it would not be onerous for an individual or business that has regular (e-mail) use, but it would be a deterrent for those who are sending millions and even billions of these e-mails," said Senator Mark Dayton (D-Minnesota).

In early March, Dayton introduced the "Computer Owners' Bill of Rights," which proposes creating a national antispam registry but does not include a charge for sending e-mail. But at the hearing, Dayton promoted an e-mail tax as well as a federal antispam SWAT team to combat growing amounts of unsolicited commercial e-mail in Internet users' in-boxes.

Dayton's ideas were several advanced at the hearing, where the consensus seemed that something should be done about spam before it cripples the Internet. But few senators and witnesses could agree on a solution.

"What was a simple annoyance last year has become a major concern this year and could cripple one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century next year if nothing is done," said Senator Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat who proposed an international spam treaty.

E-mail marketers trying to do the right thing by providing contact information and opt-out links are being driven underground by ISPs that kill their service, said Ronald Scelson, operator of Scelson Online Marketing.

Scelson's company has been forced to disguise the sender information of the 180 million pieces of e-mail it sends daily, Scelson said. One carrier shut him off after receiving 1200 complaints, he said. But with a 1 percent response rate on the unsolicited commercial e-mail it sends, far more people buy the products advertised than complain about the spam, he said.

"Why do more people buy than complain about it?" Scelson asked. "If [the mail is 100 percent legal, and [ISPs] get a single complaint, they will

turn around and kill your circuit, so we go out of business or we're forced to forge the headers. The biggest complain is you can't find us. If you could, you're going to shut us down, so why should we let you find us?"

Some ISPs add to the amount spam costs U.S. busineses - estimated at $10 billion in 2003 - by setting up spam filters that force bulk e-mailers to send one message at a time. The process eats additional bandwidth at both ends of the e-mail process.

Outlawing most commercial e-mail amounts to censorship, Scelson said, asking whether Congress will ban bulk postal mail as well.

"I'm told that there's a lot of cost factors in reading this e-mail," Scelson said. "When you read this e-mail, you go through and push 'delete.'" But with postal mail, he said, "you have to walk outside, take this junk mail out of the box, read this junk mail - have you thought about how much chemicals, pollution, and trees that are involved with this? And then you've got to throw it away."

He promised to work with Congress on any spam legislation, and threw his own spam prevention idea into the mix. Scelson advocates all e-mail applications include a "no bulk e-mail" box for customers to check, bouncing bulk e-mail back to the sender.

"It costs no money on AOL's end and no money on our end," he said. It "costs no money and gives the power back to the people. I agree that there needs to be a solution, but just don't take the freedom away from the individual."

Committee members Conrad Burns, a Montana Republican, and Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, promoted their Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing (CAN-SPAM) Act. The measure, introduced in April, outlaws false e-mail headers and requires senders of bulk commercial e-mail to provide legitimate addresses where people can opt out of future e-mail. But antispam activists have criticized the bill for only setting fines of $10 per e-mail, instead of requiring bulk e-mailers get advance permission from recipients.

During the hearing, Commissioner Orson Swindle of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission repeated criticisms of CAN-SPAM and other antispam legislation voiced at an FTC spam forum in April. Internet users shouldn't have to opt out of every piece of junk e-mail they receive, Swindle said. He also complained that companies don't want to deal with spam complaints because they might hurt their marketing opportunities.

Swindle advocates a technological solution that allows Internet users to block all e-mail except from people in their address books. "Give the consumer the power," he said. "Empower the consumer to say no to what's coming into his mailbox."

The problem with spam is that it's difficult to find the spammers, calling into question the effectiveness of most legislation, Swindle said. Senator Bill Nelson, D-Florida, proposes charging some spammers under racketeering laws, and Swindle said he's close to supporting criminal penalties for some spammers.

"What we need are a couple of good hangings," Swindle said. "I have not seen one piece of legislation that I think would be adequate."

Swindle's comments prompted Wyden to question why the FTC supported an

earlier version of the CAN-SPAM bill, which was passed by the committee last year but didn’t go to a vote of the full Senate.

"When you have the real scofflaws, when you have the real bad actors, those are not people who are paying attention to what industry self-regulatory initiatives are all about," he said, countering Swindle’s calls for the industry to police its own. "That’s why we’ve got to move the government quickly."

Schumer urged an international spam treaty. He has also proposed a national do-not-spam registry and criminal penalties for fraudulent spam. Without an international treaty, a U.S. law would cause the "most prolific spammers to flee to other countries," Schumer said.

A national law is not enough, Schumer added. "The bottom line is that the second we tighten up enforcement here at home, rogue actors go overseas to continue their activities," he said. "If we’re just focused on curbing spam here at home, we’ll be unsuccessful."

Would an FTC-administered national do-not-spam list work? Swindle said it would not. "You’re talking about an incredibly large database that would be difficult to secure," he said. "If I’m a spammer, I think that (list) is a target-rich environment."

Microsoft and Symantec contributed to the hearing as well, offering their own ideas to combat spam. Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates called for global independent trust authorities that could certify legitimate e-mail solicitations, while Symantec urged increased enforcement of existing fraud laws and beefing up the prosecutorial staff at the FTC.

The wide range of proposals came from such witnesses as Congress members and ISPs, the Network Advertising Initiative and the Electronic Privacy Information Center. All agreed that something must be done to combat spam.

"We needed legislation last year, we needed it yesterday, we need it as soon as possible," said J. Trevor Hughes, executive director of the Network Advertising Initiative, a cooperative of Internet advertisers. "Once we have that, we need strong enforcement."

Not Getting Enough Spam? Here’s 10 Ways To Get More

How E-mail addresses attract spam shouldn’t be news to IT and security administrators, but company workers often need reminders. In that vein, FrontBridge, an E-mail protection vendor, released its top 10 list of ways spammers find people.

Based on its evaluation of hundreds of millions of messages, FrontBridge distilled the characteristics of filtered spam to identify how spammers obtain, or in some cases, guess, E-mail addresses.

Put an E-mail address on a high-traffic Web site.

Post (or reply to a post) on Usenet.

Post (or reply to a post) on a public Web-based discussion group.

Register the address with a Web site that goes out of business and sells

its list.

Register the address with a Web site that sells its list.

Subscribe to a porn site with the address.

Reply to an opt-out E-mail or click on an opt-out link in a message.

Use an address with a common name that can be easily guessed (such as bob@company.com).

Register a domain name.

Post an E-mail address in a chat room.

Reminding employees of these bad habits, said FrontBridge, will reduce the risk of having workers inundated by spam.

Updated WinZip Alters Zip Format

WinZip 9.0, from the market leader among file-compression utilities, has entered public beta with scheduled release later this year, bringing with it a new .zip format - which means some of its functions will not be compatible with earlier versions or other programs.

If you use the forthcoming WinZip 9.0’s latest encryption and compression options, or create larger archives than were previously possible, your .zip files won’t be universally readable.

The final version will cost $29, and will be available as a free upgrade for all registered users. Other new features include HTML help and improved dialog boxes.

Almost every PC user can open a .zip file. Dedicated compression programs such as file managers, file viewers, and even Windows XP can handle these compressed archives. When a format is this ubiquitous, changing it, even to make major improvements, is risky for all concerned.

Still, the update provides a few handy new functions.

No change to the .zip format is likely to be as welcome as improved encryption. Using the old standard, a password-protected .zip file was safe from the prying eyes of an average person, but not those of an average hacker.

So WinZip 9.0 supports 128- and 256-bit key AES encryption, which is unlikely to be cracked by anyone. The old password protection is available, as well.

The new beta can also make your archives smaller with the optional "enhanced deflate" compression method. But don’t expect miracles. Casual testing shows significant improvements only with files that compressed a great deal to begin with, such as.bmp files. The current WinZip 8.1 can read, but not write, "enhanced deflate" .zip files.

The new version’s 64-bit extensions mean you can create archives holding more than 65,535 files and larger than 4GB--assuming you have the hardware

resources and desire. Of the three format changes, this one is least likely to cause compatibility problems; few people share 5GB files over the Internet.

WinZip isn't the first company to monkey with the .zip format recently; but its market share makes it significant. PKWare, the corporate heir to the late Phil Katz, inventor of the .zip format, has introduced incompatible options over the years, as well.

In fact, WinZip's enhanced deflate method and 64-bit extensions are based on, and compatible with, recent PKZip upgrades. PKZip added AES encryption earlier this year, but the two implementations are not compatible.

WinZip has posted the encryption spec on its Web site. Unlike PKWare, WinZip will not offer a free viewer for users lacking the appropriate application.

Will other developers of compression utilities adopt the changes? Representatives of PentaWare, maker of PentaZip and Aladdin Systems, which markets Stuff-It, confirm that they are working to make their products compatible with WinZip 9.0. PKWare has not yet decided whether it will support WinZip's encryption.

And what about Microsoft? Windows XP handles .zip files transparently, and less knowledgeable Windows XP users sometimes unzip without even realizing they're opening compressed files. These people may not know why a "compressed folder" refuses to open, if Microsoft does not support WinZip's new format. Microsoft will only say that it "has nothing to announce at this point."

Whatever happens, it's inevitable that some users will find themselves looking at a .zip file that they can't open.

House Panel Approves Permanent Internet Tax Ban

A U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee voted on Thursday to make permanent a ban on Internet-specific taxes, shrugging off attempts to link it with a more controversial effort to allow online sales taxes.

The Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law passed a measure by voice vote that would make permanent a ban on "multiple and discriminatory" taxes on Internet access fees and online traffic due to expire in November.

Senior Bush administration officials last week urged Congress to extend the ban before it expires, saying new taxes could slow the roll-out of high-speed Internet access.

The ban does not address online sales taxes, which are currently prohibited under a 1992 Supreme Court decision that forbids states from taxing catalog, telephone and other remote sales.

Cash-strapped states, "brick and mortar" retailers and other advocates of online sales taxes have sought to tie the two issues together, hoping to link the politically popular moratorium with the more controversial right to impose sales taxes on the Web.

Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Chris Cannon said the two issues should be dealt

with separately.

"I think we've come to a point where we understand what we're doing with the moratorium, and we want to make it permanent," the Utah Republican said.

Cannon said his committee would hold a hearing to examine state efforts to simplify their sales-tax codes, which would make collection of such taxes less difficult.

Microsoft Launches Antivirus Information Site

The timing couldn't have been better. The very day a new worm dubbed Palyh that targets Windows users is spreading throughout the Internet, Microsoft launched a new virus information center available at its Web site.

Microsoft has partnered with antivirus vendors Network Associates and Trend Micro to provide detailed information about significant viruses that target Windows products and operating systems. The company says it will use information from Network Associates' Anti-Virus Emergency Response Team and Trend Micro's TrendLabs to help its customers better combat viruses that affect Microsoft customers.

Microsoft software and operating systems, because of their ubiquity, are the target of choice for worm and virus writers. The most lethal worms to strike the Internet to date, including Code Red, Nimda, and Slammer, all targeted various Microsoft apps to spread. Microsoft Outlook is the most targeted E-mail client software by virus writers as well.

The Virus Information Alliance Web site is up and available.

eBay Program Turns Airline Points Into Pennies

Users of the online auction service eBay will now be able to pay for their purchases with points from frequent flier and hotel loyalty programs.

EBay Inc. has partnered with Sprint Corp., and Hilton Hotels for its new Anything Points program. Also, through the Web site points.com, American Airlines frequent flier miles can be converted into eBay Anything Points.

Each point is worth one cent, which can then be used to pay for items won on eBay auctions. However, the exchange rates are not one-to-one with other loyalty programs; it takes 10,000 Hilton HHonors points to earn $10 worth of eBay points.

Sprint will offer points as a bonus for new customers.

While eBay has made no formal announcement of the program, details are available on the eBay Web site (http://anythingpoints.ebay.com).

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